

Cold Emailing as a Research Tool Adam Bielka (University of British Columbia)

Reference librarians could improve patron service by developing a policy of integrating global expertise by encouraging patrons to make cold emails to external experts.

In the digital age, numerous professionals, academics, and entrepreneurs post their contact information online for a variety of reasons. Behind these publically listed emails and telephone numbers are billions of man-hours of study and experience. And yet often so little of this expertise is utilized by outsiders.

At the same time reference librarians are flooded with many complex, specific questions from patrons that the librarians (lacking omniscience) are often ill-equipped to answer, or even point to the appropriate resources. Big universities and other well financed organizations often are able to employ specialized subject librarians, which is somewhat helpful. However, libraries in small rural communities and/or developing countries usually have no such luxury, and have even greater need of subject expertise.

That is why I am proposing that reference librarians develop internal policies and templates to facilitate their patrons' accessing of external experts. Librarians can help patrons answer more complex questions by helping them identify appropriate experts, helping them format cold emails in manner to maximize response rate, and equipping them to repeat the process in the future on their own.

This will empower disadvantaged communities, save expensive librarian labour from exhaustive searches, and allow patrons to access a free and dynamic information network that provides articulate answers.